

**I/WE CLAIM:**

1       1. An apparatus comprising:

2                     a sterile tunnel for surrounding a plurality of  
3                     aseptically sterilized containers with pressurized sterile  
4                     air;

5                     a valve head for controlling the flow of an  
6                     aseptically sterilized product by opening and closing an  
7                     outlet port of a nozzle carrying the aseptically sterilized  
8                     product;

9                     a first end of a valve stem attached to the valve  
10                  head;

11                  a second end of the valve stem attached to a valve  
12                  actuator system for displacing the valve stem;

13                  an opening in a wall of the sterile tunnel through  
14                  which the valve stem passes; and

15                  a flexible diaphragm attached to the valve stem  
16                  and to an outer peripheral portion of the opening in the  
17                  wall of the sterile tunnel for preventing contaminants from  
18                  passing into the sterile tunnel through the opening in the  
19                  wall of the sterile tunnel.

1       2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the container is a  
2                     bottle.

1       3. The apparatus of claim 1, further including:  
2                     a tank for containing a pressurized supply of the  
3                     aseptically sterilized product; and  
4                     a measuring device connected to the tank for  
5                     measuring an amount of the product flowing from the tank to  
6                     the valve.

1       4. The apparatus of claim 3, wherein the tank is  
2                     pressurized with sterile air.

1       5. The apparatus of claim 3, further including a level  
2                     measuring device for measuring the level of the product in  
3                     the tank.

1       6. The apparatus of claim 3, wherein the measuring device  
2                     is a volume flow meter.

1       7. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the volume flow meter  
2                     is a magnetic flow meter.

1       8. The apparatus of claim 3, wherein the measuring device  
2       is a mass flow meter.

1       9. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the diaphragm  
2       comprises a material for not contaminating the aseptically  
3       sterilized product.

1       10. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the diaphragm  
2       material is selected from the group consisting of ethylene-  
3       propylene-dieneterpolymers, fluoroelastomer and  
4       polytetrafluoroethylene.

1           11. An apparatus comprising:

2                 a sterile tunnel for surrounding a plurality of  
3                 aseptically sterilized containers with pressurized sterile  
4                 air;

5                 a nozzle for carrying an aseptically sterilized  
6                 product into the sterile tunnel;

7                 a valve head for controlling the flow of  
8                 aseptically sterilized product by opening and closing an  
9                 outlet port of the nozzle;

10                 a first end of a valve stem attached to the valve  
11                 head;

12                 a second end of the valve stem attached to a  
13                 sealed actuator system for displacing the valve stem,  
14                 wherein the valve head, the valve stem and the sealed  
15                 actuator system are surrounded by the sterile tunnel;

16                 a control conduit connecting the sealed actuator  
17                 system with a control system;

18                 an opening in a wall of the sterile tunnel through  
19                 which the control conduit passes; and

20                 a sealing member for sealing the control conduit  
21                 within the opening in the wall of the sterile tunnel.

1       12. The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the container is a  
2       bottle.

1       13. The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the sealed actuator  
2       system is an electromagnet system.

1       14. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the control conduit  
2       is an electrical cable.

1       15. The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the sealed actuator  
2       is a pneumatic actuator.

1       16. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the control conduit  
2       is a pneumatic hose.

1       17. The apparatus of claim 11, further including:  
2                 a tank for containing a pressurized supply of the  
3                 product; and  
4                 a measuring device connected to the tank for  
5                 measuring an amount of the product flowing from the tank to  
6                 the valve.

1        18. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein the tank is  
2        pressurized with sterile air.

1       19. The apparatus of claim 17, further including a level  
2       measuring device for measuring the level of the product in  
3       the tank.

1        20. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein the measuring device  
2        is a volume flow meter.

21. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein the measuring device is a mass flow meter.

1           22. A method comprising:

2                         controlling the flow of an aseptic product using a  
3                         valve;

4                         surrounding a region where the aseptic product  
5                         exits the valve with a sterile region; and

6                         controlling the opening or closing of the valve  
7                         with a sealed actuator, wherein the sealed actuator is  
8                         surrounded with the sterile region.

23. The method of claim 22, further including providing a tank for containing a supply of pressurized aseptic product flowing to the valve.

24. The method of claim 23, further including providing a measuring device for measuring the amount of pressurized aseptic product flowing from the tank to the valve.

1           25. The method of claim 22, further including providing a  
2           second apparatus wherein the container is filled to a first  
3           level with the product exiting from the first apparatus, and  
4           the container is filled to a second level with the product  
5           exitting from the second apparatus.

1           26. The method of claim 24, further including:

2                 exposing the valve, an interior surface of the  
3             tank, and an interior surface of the measuring device to  
4             steam;

5                 covering an exit of the valve; and

6                 allowing a build-up of steam pressure inside the  
7             tank to above a temperature of about 250°F, a steam pressure  
8             of about 50 psig, for about 30 minutes.

1           27. The method of claim 20, further including:

2                 uncovering the exit of the valve; and  
3                 providing sterile air to reduce the temperature of  
4             the valve, the interior surface of the tank, and the  
5             interior surface of the measuring device to the temperature  
6             of the product.

1           28. An apparatus comprising:

2                 a sterile tunnel for surrounding a plurality of

3                 aseptically sterilized containers with pressurized sterile

4                 air;

5                 a valve for controlling the flow of an aseptically

6                 sterilized product through an outlet port of a nozzle;

7                 a plurality of flow passages formed between an

8                 inner wall of the nozzle and a plurality of indentations on

9                 an outer surface of the valve, wherein the plurality of flow

10                 passages transport the aseptically sterilized product to the

11                 outlet port;

12                 a valve seat in the nozzle for stopping the flow

13                 of aseptically sterilized product through the plurality of

14                 flow passages;

15                 a sealed actuator system for displacing the valve

16                 into an open position; and

17                 a control conduit connecting the sealed actuator

18                 system with a control system.

1           29. The apparatus of claim 28, wherein the container is a

2                 bottle.

1           30. The apparatus of claim 28, further including:  
2                         a tank for containing a pressurized supply of the  
3                         aseptically sterilized product; and  
4                         a measuring device connected to the tank for  
5                         measuring an amount of the aseptic product flowing from the  
6                         tank to the valve.

1           31. The apparatus of claim 30, wherein the tank is  
2                 pressurized with sterile air.

1           32. The apparatus of claim 30, further including a level  
2                 measuring device for measuring the level of the product in  
3                 the tank.

1           33. The apparatus of claim 30, wherein the measuring device  
2                 is a volume flow meter.

1           34. The apparatus of claim 33, wherein the volume flow  
2                 meter is a magnetic flow meter.

1           35. The apparatus of claim 30, wherein the measuring device  
2                 is a mass flow meter.

1       36. The apparatus of claim 28, wherein the sealed actuator  
2       system is an electromagnet for displacing the valve into an  
3       open position allowing the aseptically sterilized product to  
4       flow through the plurality of flow passages and through the  
5       outlet port into the container.

60 50 30 20 10 0

37. A method comprising:

controlling the flow of an aseptic product through a nozzle using a valve;

surrounding a region where the aseptic product exits the valve with a sterile region; and

displacing the valve with an electromagnetic actuator, wherein an electrical current applied to the electromagnetic actuator displaces the valve into an open position allowing the aseptic product to flow through an outlet port of the nozzle.

38. The method of claim 37, wherein an outer surface of the valve includes indentations for forming aseptic product flow passages between an inner wall of the nozzle and the outer surface of the valve for transporting the aseptic product to the outlet port of the nozzle.

39. The method of claim 37, further including providing a pressurized aseptic product into the nozzle.

40. The method of claim 39, further including removing the electric current to the electromagnet actuator allowing the

3       valve to be displaced by the pressurized aseptic product  
4       into a closed position sealing the outlet port of the  
5       nozzle.